

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for selecting farms to grow a crop of interest comprising:
  - a database;
  - a farm identifier in communication with the database to develop a set of farms capable of growing the crop of interest;
  - a competition analyzer cooperating with the farm identifier to estimate profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest;
  - an offer developer cooperating with the competition analyzer to determine possible offers to be made to the farms in the set of farms based at least in part upon the estimated profits to be earned for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and
  - a farm selector cooperating with the offer developer to select farms from the set of farms to receive an offer to grow the crop of interest.
2. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the farm selector selects farms based upon at least one of: the estimated profits developed by the offer developer, risk estimations associated with the farms in the set of farms, profit to be earned by an agricultural company, price to be charged consumers, transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a loader; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest

from a farm to an elevator; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from an elevator to the predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a loader to the predefined location; aggregate economic profiles of elevators associated with the farms in the set of farms; and aggregate economic profiles of loaders associated with the farms in the set of farms.

3. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the farm identifier identifies the set of farms based upon at least one of: elevator capability to handle the crop of interest, loader capability to handle the crop of interest, farm capability to grow the crop of interest, farm capability to grow a predefined quantity of the crop of interest, and farm capability to grow the crop of interest within a predetermined schedule.

4. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the database comprises at least one of: (a) a product database containing data indicative of types of products that may be grown by a farm, (b) an elevator database containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by an elevator; (c) a loader database containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by a loader; (d) a product market database containing data indicative of sales prices of types of products; (e) a transportation market database containing data indicative of transportation costs for transporting goods between geographic locations; (f) a

transportation database containing data indicative of types of transportation available for transporting a product from at least one of a farm, an elevator and a loader; and (g) a farm database containing data indicative of at least one of agronomic characteristics of a farm and geographic information concerning a farm.

5. An apparatus as defined in claim 4 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises an on-line database.

6. An apparatus as defined in claim 4 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises a local database.

7. An apparatus as defined in claim 5 wherein the on-line database comprises an on-line exchange.

8. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the farm identifier further comprises:

an elevator/loader discriminator for developing the set of farms by identifying elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest; and  
a farm discriminator cooperating with the elevator/loader discriminator for developing the set of farms by eliminating farms that are associated with only elevators/loaders identified by the elevator/loader discriminator from the

set of farms and by eliminating farms that cannot grow the crop of interest from the set of farms.

9. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the competition analyzer further comprises:

a profit estimator for estimating a profit that a farm in the set of farms can expect to earn by growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and

a product selector cooperating with the profit estimator to select a most profitable crop for the farm from the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest.

10. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the offer developer further comprises:

a production estimator in communication with the database for estimating a quantity of the crop of interest to be produced by a farm of interest in the set of farms; and

a pricing engine cooperating with the production estimator to develop a price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest estimated by the production estimator.

11. An apparatus as defined in claim 10 wherein the offer developer further comprises a risk identifier in communication with the

database for identifying a risk factor associated with the farm of interest, wherein the pricing engine develops the price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest estimated by the production estimator based at least in part upon the risk factor.

12. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 the farm selector further comprises:

a farm screener in communication with the database for selecting a preferred set of farms from the set of farms based on at least one of: (i) a risk factor, (ii) an expected profit, and (iii) an expected quantity;

an elevator/loader profiler for developing an aggregate economic profile for each elevator/loader associated with a farm in the preferred set of farmers; and

an elevator/loader selector for selecting farms to receive an offer to grow the crop of interest based on the aggregate economic profiles developed by the elevator/loader profiler and the quantity of the crop of interest to be grown .

13. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the competition analyzer estimates the profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest based upon at least one current market price.

14. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein, for a farm in question associated with more than one elevator/loader, the offer developer determines the possible offer based upon the elevator/loader with a highest relative profit to be earned by the farm in question.

15. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the offer developer determines the possible offers based in part upon at least one risk factor and profits to be earned by the farms in growing the crop of interest.

16. An apparatus as defined in claim 2 wherein the aggregate economic profiles of the elevators are based at least in part upon cost and risk associated with the farms associated with the elevators.

17. An apparatus as defined in claim 2 wherein the aggregate economic profiles of the loaders are based at least in part upon cost and risk associated with the farms associated with the loaders.

18. A method for selecting farms to grow a crop of interest comprising the steps of:

developing a set of farms capable of growing the crop of interest;  
estimating profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest;

determining possible offers to be made to the farms in the set of farms based at least in part upon the estimated profits to be earned for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and selecting farms from the set of farms to receive an offer to grow the crop of interest.

19. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of selecting farms is based upon at least one of: the estimated profits developed by the offer developer, risk estimations associated with the farms in the set of farms, profit to be earned by an agricultural company, price to be charged consumers, transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to a loader; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a farm to an elevator; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from an elevator to the predefined location; transportation cost for transporting the crop of interest from a loader to the predefined location; aggregate economic profiles of elevators associated with the farms in the set of farms; and aggregate economic profiles of loaders associated with the farms in the set of farms.

20. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of developing the set of farms is performed by considering at least one of: elevator capability to handle the crop of interest, loader capability to handle

the crop of interest, farm capability to grow the crop of interest, farm capability to grow a predefined quantity of the crop of interest, and farm capability to grow the crop of interest within a predetermined schedule.

21. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of developing the set of farms is performed by accessing a database.

22. A method as defined in claim 21 wherein the database comprises at least one of: (a) a product database containing data indicative of types of products that may be grown by a farm, (b) an elevator database containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by an elevator; (c) a loader database containing data indicative of types and quantities of products that may be handled by a loader; (d) a product market database containing data indicative of sales prices of types of products; (e) a transportation market database containing data indicative of transportation costs for transporting goods between geographic locations; (f) a transportation database containing data indicative of types of transportation available for transporting a product from at least one of a farm, an elevator and a loader; and (g) a farm database containing data indicative of at least one of agronomic characteristics of a farm and geographic information concerning a farm.

23. A method as defined in claim 22 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises an on-line database.

24. A method as defined in claim 22 wherein at least one of the at least one database comprises a local database.

25. A method as defined in claim 23 wherein the on-line database comprises an on-line exchange.

26. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of developing the set of farms further comprises the steps of:

identifying elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest;  
eliminating farms from the set of farms that are associated with only the elevators/loaders that cannot handle the crop of interest; and  
eliminating farms that cannot grow the crop of interest from the set of farms.

27. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of estimating profits further comprises the steps of:

estimating a profit that a farm in the set of farms can expect to earn by growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest; and  
selecting a most profitable crop for the farm from the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest.

28. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of determining possible offers further comprises the steps of:

estimating a quantity of the crop of interest to be produced by a farm of interest in the set of farms; and

developing a price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the estimated quantity of the crop of interest.

29. A method as defined in claim 28 wherein the step of determining possible offers further comprises the steps of:

identifying a risk factor associated with the farm of interest; and

adjusting the price to be offered the farm of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest based at least in part upon the risk factor.

30. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of selecting farms further comprises the steps of:

selecting a preferred set of farms from the set of farms based on at least one of: (i) a risk factor, (ii) an expected profit, and (iii) an expected quantity;

developing an aggregate economic profile for each elevator/loader associated with a farm in the preferred set of farms; and

selecting farms to receive an offer to grow the crop of interest based on the developed aggregate economic profiles and the quantity of the crop of interest to be grown .

31. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of estimating profits further comprises the step of estimating the profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing the at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest based upon at least one current market price.

32. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein, for a farm in question associated with more than one elevator/loader, the step of determining possible offers comprises determining the possible offer based upon the elevator/loader with a highest relative profit to be earned by the farm in question.

33. A method as defined in claim 18 wherein the step of determining possible offers is based in part upon at least one risk factor and profits to be earned by the farms in growing the crop of interest.

34. A method as defined in claim 19 wherein the aggregate economic profiles of the elevators are based at least in part upon cost and risk associated with the farms associated with the elevators.

35. A method as defined in claim 19 wherein the aggregate economic profiles of the loaders are based at least in part upon cost and risk associated with the farms associated with the loaders.

36. A method for estimating future profits for farms in a region of interest for growing a crop of interest, the method comprising the steps of:
- identifying farms in the region of interest;
  - electronically accessing at least one on-line market to ascertain at least one current market price for at least one product different than the crop of interest;
  - determining projected profits to each of the farms in the region of interest for growing products different than the crop of interest based at least partially on the at least one current market price;
  - selecting at least one of the products to be replaced by the crop of interest on at least some of the farms in the region of interest;
  - determining profits to be earned by the at least some of the farms for growing the crop of interest; and
  - summing the profits to be earned by the farms in the region of interest for growing the crop of interest.

37. An apparatus for determining a price to offer a farmer to grow a crop of interest comprising:
- a database containing current market price data for crops which are different from the crop of interest;
  - a profit estimator in communication with the database for estimating a profit that the farmer can expect to earn by growing at least one of the crops which are different from the crop of interest;

a product selector cooperating with the profit estimator to select a crop from the at least one of the crops which are different from the crop of interest;

a production estimator cooperating with the product selector for estimating a quantity of the crop of interest to be produced by a farmer on acreage associated with the crop selected by the product selector; and

a pricing engine cooperating with the production estimator to develop a price to be offered the farmer of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest estimated by the production estimator based at least in part on the profit that the farmer can expect to earn by growing the crop selected by the product selector.

38. A method for determining a price to offer a farmer to grow a crop of interest comprising the steps of:

accessing a database containing current market price data for crops which are different from the crop of interest;

estimating a profit that the farmer can expect to earn by growing at least one of the crops which are different from the crop of interest;

selecting a crop from the at least one of the crops which are different from the crop of interest;

estimating a quantity of the crop of interest to be produced by a farmer on acreage associated with the selected crop; and

developing a price to be offered the farmer of interest to grow the estimated quantity of the crop of interest based at least in part on the profit that

the farmer can expect to earn by growing the selected crop which is different than the crop of interest.

39. A method as defined in claim 38 wherein the step of developing a price further comprises the steps of:

identifying a risk factor associated with the farmer of interest; and adjusting the price to be offered the farmer of interest to grow the quantity of the crop of interest based at least in part upon the risk factor.

40. A method for developing economic information relating to activities of farms comprising the steps of:

identifying farms capable of growing a crop of interest;  
electronically accessing at least one on-line market to ascertain at least one current market price for at least one product different than a crop of interest;

determining projected profits to the identified farms for growing at least one product different than the crop of interest based at least partially upon the at least one current market price;

selecting at least one of the products to be replaced by the crop of interest on at least some of the identified farms based at least in part upon the projected profits;

estimating an economic effect that substituting the crop of interest for the at least one of the products will have on at least one of: (a) a transportation

market; (b) a commodity market; (c) demand for storage space; (d) land usage; (e) a price of at least one of the at least one of the products; (f) supply of at least one product; (g) demand for at least one input to a farm; .

41. A method as defined in claim 40 further comprising the step of taking market action based upon the estimated economic effect.

42. A method as defined in claim 40 wherein the commodity market is associated with at least one of the at least one of the products to be replaced by the crop of interest.

43. A method for securing a resource for growing crops comprising the steps of:

developing a set of farms capable of growing a crop of interest;  
estimating profits to be earned by farms in the set of farms for growing at least one crop which is different from the crop of interest;  
analyzing at least one of the estimated profits and estimated yields of the farms to identify an undervalued resource; and  
taking market action to secure the identified undervalued resource.

44. A method as defined in claim 43 wherein the undervalued resource comprises at least one of land and storage space.

45. A method for reducing risk associated with contracting to growing a crop of interest comprising the steps of:

identifying farms capable of growing a crop of interest;

electronically accessing at least one on-line market to ascertain at least one current market price for at least one product different than a crop of interest;

determining projected profits to each of the identified farms for growing products different than the crop of interest based at least partially upon the at least one current market price;

selecting at least one of the products to be replaced by the crop of interest on at least some of the identified farms based at least in part upon the projected profits; and

selecting a subset of the identified farms to grow the crop of interest based on the profit that the identified farms can expect to earn by growing the crop which is replaced by the crop of interest and upon at least one risk associated with the geographic location of the identified farms.

46. A method as defined in claim 45 wherein the at least one risk comprises at least one of weather risk and logistics risk.

47. A method for managing inventory relating to growing a crop of interest to an agricultural entity comprising the steps of:

identifying farms capable of growing the crop of interest;

selecting farms from the identified farms to grow the crop of interest;  
contracting with at least some of the selected farms to grow the crop of  
interest; and  
  
managing the inventory based at least in part on contractual  
commitments made by the selected farms.

48. A method as defined in claim 41 wherein the market action is taken by at least one of an electronic buying agent and an electronic selling agent.

49. An apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein the database is at least partially populated by a software agent which is programmed to locate and retrieve data of interest from a networked device.

50. An apparatus as defined in claim 49 wherein the apparatus is coupled to the networked device via the Internet.

51. A method for estimating an effect growing a crop of interest will have on a region of interest comprising the steps of:

identifying farms in the region of interest which are capable of growing the crop of interest;

determining a first set of aggregated projected inputs and outputs of the farms in the region of interest for growing products different than the crop of interest;

selecting at least one of the products to be replaced by the crop of interest on at least some of the farms in the region of interest;

determining a second set of aggregated projected inputs and outputs of farms in the region of interest assuming the at least some of the farms replace the at least one of the products with the crop of interest; and

computing a difference between the first and second sets of aggregated inputs and outputs to estimate at least one effect growing the crop of interest will have on the region of interest.